CLAY GEERDES' COMIX WAVE 121
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EL VIBORA 145 is $10 from J. M. Berengueuer, Plaza Beatas 3, Barcelona, Spain. Contains a Spanish reprint of a Gilbert Shelton story, and lots of interesting Spanish art. The emphasis is on erotica, adventure, and violence. **KISS COMIX 4** is $10 from the same address, a fairly new title which is all erotica.

To those people who keep asking when I am going to do a book, the newsletter is already a book 714 pages long and it grows two pages longer per month. Have them bound and stick it on the shelf. I've gone through a book with a friend of mine and it was a thankless project. If I do put all of these letters together in book form I will desktop publish it and sell the copies as they are ordered.

I went to a retrospective of the art of **Pat Ryan** at the Center Art Center in Healdsburg, California. Pat's Indian paintings, album art, and some early comic strips were on display. The show will run from April 5 through May 2. 223 Center Street. For info, call 707-433-9364.

FAT FREDDY'S CAT 7 will be out this June.

For a copy of **PROPAGANDA WAR 12**, send a 29¢ stamp to Clark Dissmeyer, 2313 Central Ave, Kearney, NE 68847.

Penguin's latest is a book of cartoons by S. Gross, **YOUR MOTHER IS A REMARKABLE WOMAN.**

We live in a world of frightful givens. It is *given* that you will behave like this, *given* that you will care about that. No one thinks about the givens. Isn't it amazing? In the information society, nobody thinks. We expected to banish paper, but we actually banished thought.

Michael Crichton
JURASSIC PARK, 1990.

Dear Clay,

Why do people collect comics? My brother's side of the room is full of boxes of comics. He puts them all in plastic bags and keeps lists of them in a little notebook. He's always looking through them to make sure he hasn't missed an issue of X-Men or something. I read a comic book once in awhile but when I finish with it I toss it away. Any thoughts on this?

Terence L. Taylor

Dear Terry,

Some thoughts, but no final answers.

I collect, therefore I am. When I look at an early issue of Plastic Man or Captain Marvel or Uncle Scrooge, my eight-year-old self smiles with satisfaction. I think most older collectors have this impulse. They find something from childhood and that leads to something else and soon they are recreating their childhood surroudings via the artifacts--comic books, dolls, baseball cards, movie star photos. I think everyone collects something, though many deny it and don't recognize what they do as collecting. I had an aunt who collected shoes, blouses, and butterfly pins. She bought a new blouse the way I buy a comic book. My mother collected teacups and saucers. As I've written elsewhere, I collected everything when I grew up. I even had a jar of cicada shells that turned up missing after one of my mother's cleaning raids. I would still collect everything if I had the money and the space.

But not all collectors are alike. We all share the collecting syndrome, but it manifests itself in different ways. Some collectors do it for show. They want people to know what they have and they often start stores, galleries, or museums to flaunt their booty in the public eye. Other collectors are inhibited and shy and may even buy under fake names or through third parties. People who collect erotica often fall in this category. John Edgar Hoover collected pornography, but who knew anything about that until well after his death? Most of us are in the middle of these extremes. I know people who would like to show off what they have accumulated, but are a little too private to do it. I doubt that there is a dealer anywhere who isn't a collector. In comics, everyone I know is a little of both.

Collecting has nothing to do with money in the beginning. Kids don't think about money. I used to collect pop bottle caps. Little chump I was. The coke bottles from that era now sell for $30 to 50, but when I was a boy *Depression Glass* meant a nickel back on the bottle. I collected marbles and played against other kids to try to win more of them. I had aggies and tiger's eyes and steelies that I valued far beyond what my dad paid for them at the five and dime uptown. No, the impulse to collect comes along long before any understanding of money. The most useless collection I ever saw was in the house of one of my nephew's aunts. She had died the week before and we were over there picking up something and he told me to come upstairs. In this one back room his aunt, an elementary teacher all her life, had kept every single art activity her kids had ever done. She had paper chains and finger paintings and more badly drawn valentines than I had ever seen in one place. The place was a complete firetrap and the collection was worth nothing--to anyone but her. I'm sure all her life she was quite proud of it and often sat up there in that rocker looking at this or that and smiling.

I know what motivates a collector, Terry, the desire to hang on to something that somehow defines who you are or who you were, but I don't pretend to understand people like you who throw comic books away after reading them. I've had arguments with people who say it's a matter of things versus people. Or the tangible versus the intangible. I always found it interesting that Greg Irons professed Buddhism, because I was in his house in Berkeley many times and he had a lot of nonspiritual tangible junk collected there. If he had given up the things of this world for the life of the spirit, I never noticed it.

No, I really do not understand the noncollector mind, because I do not remember a time in my own life when I didn't collect and try to hang on to anything that came my way.

-Uncle Clay

Dear Uncle Clay,

I'm getting older and have decided I would like to donate my collection of comics to a museum. Can you recommend one?

Rod McCormack

Dear Rod--

There are a number of museums that accept comic books and comic art collections these days. There are also archives in several universities. I would have to know what kind of comics you have and what you have in mind for them before I could be specific, but you should know that donating a collection does not mean anything will be done with it. If you see in your mind's eye your collection displayed in glass cases and nice frames for the public to admire daily, you are likely to be disappointed. A museum is like any other organized institution, a group of people who are into various things that interest *them*. If your interests and theirs coincide, you might be happy donating what you have, if not you could be very disappointed. If your collection is sitting in a spare room or basement, it could wind up sitting in the basement of a museum as well.

Ideally, you should go and see the museum you are thinking of giving your collection to. If you have, say, a collection of underground comix, you will have to find that rare museum that will deal with these books and the problems they represent. There is an archive at the Parks Library on the campus of the University of Iowa in Ames, Iowa, but your comix may duplicate what is already there so you would have to correspond with the current librarian. I do know that the books are indexed and kept up at Parks and that they are available to students of the medium.

Libraries and museums continually do shows which feature what they have. These are done in the public interest and as fund raisers since many of the organizations are non-profit. A library, for example, might do a thematic show of comic books and art from World War II. The show might last two or three weeks, then be packed up and put back in storage. When the books and art are not on display, they are stored in basement rooms with the many other materials that have been donated to the organization. Some of the shows, like a recent one which featured the art and paintings of Theodore Seuss Geisel, move around from museum to museum over a period of years.

I mention all of this because most collectors like the idea of having their collections shown, but shudder at the idea that their priceless donations are going to mildew in some forgotten corner of a museum basement.

Hey, that's not the worst that can happen. Museums routinely sell donated materials to raise funds for other projects, particularly if these materials duplicate what is already on hand. If you wish to donate a collection to a museum and ensure that it will be kept and not sold you have to negotiate that kind of deal in writing. You need to contact a lawyer who specializes in this field. Otherwise, you can donate what you wish, but once the comic books, art, whatever, leave your hands, the museum is free to do whatever it wishes with it.

Write to some of the libraries and museums and see what kind of response you get. That's the best way to start. You can usually tell by the kind of shows a museum has done in the past whether or not they would treat your donation the way you would have it treated. Unless you have something pretty rare, do not be surprised if they tell you they cannot accept your donation as a permanent holding.

-Clay

PRE AND POST CONVENTION MINDSETS

There is a big difference between pre-Convention and post-Convention fandom. Today's fan has been conned in the old sense of the term and seldom says anything real about what is presented. All you get from him [hers included] is just fannish praise for schlock art and repetitious action layouts. Mediocrity chic rules. The fan asks for autographs from people he neither knows nor cares about simply because someone has told him that person is famous and, more important, the person's name scribbled in the book will increase its value. Ha!

You can only be a fan of what you know and what you know is what you see in the stores and hear about through the adzines, so the heavier the promo, the more fans. Quality has little meaning since collecting usually ends when the title ends. Could be that some guy in North Dakota is doing the greatest comic art since Winsor McCay, but no one sees it but his friends since he doesn't know how to get into the comic business. If you found this guy and published his stuff in a book and could find a way to distribute it [the hardest part of the comic business], would he be praised and collected? Hell, no. His book would sit

on the shelf with a thousand other titles and only a handful of people would ever take the trouble of opening the cover to look at the interior art. If the guy went to work for Marvel, on the other hand, he would be hyped as the latest Wally Wood, packaged and sold at the conventions, advertised widely in organized fandom, and within a very short time the title he was assigned to draw would be collected by the same brainwashed slobbering little groupies who collected the last company product. This is the sad reality of modern comicdom.

The pre-Con fan loved the comics because of the artwork in them. The Post-Con fan has to find out what comics he ought to be collecting before he spends his money and, hey, surprise, he's collecting X-Men and Spiderman just like thousands of other comicologically correct fans. Like, there may be a lot of really unique artwork in those off-brand comics, but they're not really collectable. They'll never be worth much. They don't have the company seal of approval.

Today's post-Con kid collector saves what he has been told to save and he is a conformist like his peers. He'll grow up and buy junk bonds over the phone.

When I first started attending comic conventions back in the early seventies, I would walk around the dealer's room and look at the older people sitting at tables behind their books. They had the good ones. The early Captain Marvels and Marvel Mysteries and Plastic Mans and Features and Phantom Ladies, the stuff I remembered and loved as a boy. They never had any prices on these books and I knew why. They were people like me who loved what was in those books, the characters and the stories that were associated with their childhood. Money wasn't the point. If you asked a price, they would haul out the Guide and look it up, but they didn't really want to do that, because they didn't really want to sell any of their books. They wanted to sit there and show people that they had them the way they used to invite some guys over from school and take them into their rooms and show them the same comic books.

Today I see a lot of professional dealers with the same books hanging up in plastic behind them and the price stickers often run in the thousands and when I stand at the table I know I have nothing to say to these hucksters. They look at an old Whiz to see if it has a rusty staple or a kid's name on the inside or a little tear somewhere and all the time they are grading the book and calculating how much they can make on it. The characters and stories mean nothing to them. They look at me in terms of dollars and when they figure out that I am not likely to fork over several thousand dollars for an old copy of Action Comics [in which the art was so shitty for the first few issues that no one I knew even bought it off the stands] they ignore me and go on grading and pricing.

Is this progress? I don't see it that way. I saw the early cons as groups of friends getting together and having a good time with comics as the catalyst. Today's cons have become strictly business and guys run around with module phones and beepers on their belts racing from power lunch to company strategy sessions--give me a break. Even the panels have deteriorated from friendly gossip sessions to Buy Our Great Super Hero Books sessions hosted by company flacks and bullpen slaves. These PR people are usually talking among themselves and allowing the pimply groupies to eavesdrop.

It's been said that people become feminists later in life, in their thirties or when they get out in the job market. The interesting thing is that during adolescence women have more of one sort of power than they ever will again, namely sexual power. Young women are desirable. They are not yet in a position where they have to assert themselves intellectually or economically. So an eighteen-year-old woman will sometimes not see what feminism is for; often it seems to say nothing to them. At the same time, it's necessary to add that adolescence is a very difficult time for young women because they're very concerned about being likeable to teenager boys. But compared to how it's going to be later, women have more power as adolescents. That's not to say they're powerful, just more powerful.

--Robin Lakoff

There were famous alter boys. You became famous by doing something memorable on the alter--showing the enormous holes in your shoes when you knelt down--of holes in your socks; wearing cowboy boots with big heels; having an erection and telling everyone; having a laughing fit and being yelled at by the priest while he was saying mass. Franny Cresta threw up once during mass, and everyone had to sit down while a janitor mopped it up. Augie D'Agostino was famous for tripping on the alter carpet--two or three times--and actually falling on his face. My brother Louis was serving with Robert Libby the time Libby shit his pants, the most famous alter boy incident of all-how his face changed, how he panicked, how he shook a turd out of his trouserleg.

--Paul Theroux
My Secret History